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Predictive Procedures at Delhi Racecourse**

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Betting on Performed Futures

Predictive Procedures at Delhi Racecourse

Stine Simonsen Puri

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“Stine, which horse do you fancy?”
“I am not sure. Which do you like?”
“I am thinking of backing [betting on] number three.”
“Why?”
“I don’t think the favorite is on job [not trying to win]. That owner has two horses running, and I think he will have number three win even though number five is better, so that he can make some money with long odds.”
—A bettor fifteen minutes before a race at the Delhi racecourse

In this article I focus on procedures for predicting the near future among bettors at Delhi Racecourse. The paper is based on my long-term fieldwork at the Delhi racecourse, and a number of other racecourses in India, between 2009 and 2010.¹ I argue that the short-term speculations in the near future, as represented in betting decision making, are oriented toward predicting people rather than horses. This is tied to the dominant idea that a large proportion of races are fixed or manipulated by people. The future is therefore not considered to be an open-ended event subject to laws of chance, but rather a spectacle, orchestrated by the people in the racing industry in order to make money from betting on races, while concealing the underlying reality of race fixing. Understanding people’s intentions, as well as being connected to those who might know something about the races or by figuring out patterns in the ways races are fixed, is therefore key to attempts of predicting future outcomes.

First, it is important to note that I am not working from the assumption that there are manipulated races in the Indian racing industry, as this is something I have been unable to determine, as the very nature of race fixing is that it is a secret. Rather than this being a study on the practice of race fixing, inspired by the work of Arjun Appadurai, I am looking into how the *imagination* of a manipulated future structures procedures for prediction, thereby painting the picture of a certain kind of calculative ethos that fuses methods of probability and the anticipations of possible performed futures.² The future imaginary at the racecourse opens up to various procedures of prediction that attempt to reveal concealed information and economic exchanges as ways of acting upon the socioeconomic structures behind the racing spectacle.

1. This research has been supported by the Danish Research Council for Independent Research.

2. See Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact*; Appadurai, “The Spirit of Calculation”; and Appadurai, “The Ghost in the Financial Machine.”

I purposely use the phrase *procedures of prediction*, rather than simply the word *prediction*, in order to emphasize it as a social practice and not just a question of knowledge and intellectual calculation. I define procedures for prediction as a method of managing information under uncertainty. This is a form of speculation, characterized by the goal of making money from future uncertainties, as well as by the kind of knowledge production activated, which is based primarily on figuring out concealed layers of reality rather than building upon known facts.³

When I argue that bettors bet on people rather than on horses, it has to do with the idea that it is foremost the people, and not the horses, that are thought to make the outcomes of the races. People instruct the jockeys in how the horses are to perform—they perform futures already scripted. This could be a future scripted by a bookmaker wanting to cash in the money that has been placed with him on a favorite horse, or a horse owner, who has made a deal with another horse owner on which of their horses should win (the horse that they will both bet on). It could also be a future fixed by a jockey owing another jockey a favor after having given him information on another race. Despite the idea of the races being spectacles of performed futures, they are imbued with uncertainty. During the time of my fieldwork, bettors could never reach any certainty about how the future had come into being or who had arranged it—and neither could I. We were all left to speculate about the endless possibilities.

Examining the predictive procedures in such a setting, which to a great extent also determines what bettors bet,⁴ reveals something about how contingency is imagined and acted upon. Part of the contingency of horse racing in India is thus not just tied to the horses and their bodies, but woven into imagined economic systems of exchange of money and information among jockeys,

bookmakers, horse owners, bettors, and the mafia (and their friends and families). In the article I will show how the assumed presence of race fixing does not represent a threat to the betting economy, but rather is part of its attraction, especially so, it seems, for the younger generation, as new methods for predicting a fixed future is developing.

The racecourse, despite its complexity, offers a simplified and bounded speculative market where stakes are made on events (races) finalized every thirty minutes. On one hand, the racecourse gives us insight into the kind of speculations that are made in an Indian economic system, which is characterized by an overarching discourse of corruption that foregrounds the failures of the economy.⁵ This is a system where people are not believed to be playing by the existing rules and laws and where bribes and kickbacks are thought to be a necessary route to success. On the other hand, the racecourse also enables an exploration of modes of speculation more generally and of parallels to gambling and financial markets outside the Indian context.

Observations from gambling and game-playing settings have been central to the development of economic theories, such as probability theory⁶ and game theory,⁷ and more specifically behavioral economics and finance concerned with decision making under uncertainty. Gambling markets continue to be studied by economists as empirical sites; for example, horse-betting markets are analyzed in order to understand more complex financial markets.⁸ Yet, such analyses rest upon a narrow understanding of probability theories, and they neglect the social context of particular biases or instances of incorrect information. These theories of decision making are developed out of ideas of games existing beyond bounded social and cultural contexts. Thus they are interested in identifying universal laws of behavior under various circumstances.

3. See Bear et al., "Speculation," in this issue.

4. Bettors sometimes change their minds on what to bet once inside the betting ring, as they use the odds to determine possible fixed futures. This is a complex practice, which I have described elsewhere. See Puri, "Betting on People."

5. See Shah, "Morality, Corruption, and the State"; Gupta, "Narratives of Corruption"; Parry, "The Crisis of Corruption"; and Gupta, "Blurred Boundaries."

6. See Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*.

7. For further discussion see Morgenstern and Neumann, *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*.

8. See Peirson and Blackburn, "Betting at British Racecourses"; Smith, "The Impact of Tipster Information"; Schnytzer and Shilony, "Is the Presence of Inside Traders Necessary?"; Bruce and Johnson, "Investigating Betting Behavior"; and Edelman, "A Competitive Horse-Race Handicapping Algorithm."

Anthropological studies on gambling, conversely, enable a critique of contemporary theoretical attempts to analyze behavior in speculative markets. Such studies have shown that the key to understanding gambling lies in the social and cultural context in which the game takes place, and not simply in the internal structure of the game.⁹ The perception of uncertainties in the game is thus located beyond the game itself, in the socio-economic context in which the game takes place. One of the first ethnographic studies to illustrate this is the widely known text of Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes a Balinese Cockfight.”¹⁰ Although this text is not often read in order to understand gambling behavior specifically, Geertz nevertheless shows how stakes depend on the owners of the cocks, and their position in the local hierarchy, rather than the cocks themselves. In this article, I investigate whether a similar dynamic is at stake in Delhi, where the uncertainty of the horses has to do with the social context in which the horses are running.

Addressing decision making under uncertainty is particularly interesting in an Indian setting, which has often been characterized as an economy of corruption. Rather than defining the racecourse as an economy of corruption, I simply examine it in terms of exchange—both imagined and real exchanges of money and information. My hope is that using the analytical framework of the anthropology of finance and comparing it with other forms of gambling may offer a fresh look at economic uncertainty in India.

In the article, I describe two different bettors whom I have followed over a long period of time: Chipper, who uses his cell phone to buy inside information, and Mr. Singh, who uses statistics.¹¹ What these two different methods of managing information have in common is an imagination of the future as fixed by people. Before turning to Chipper and Mr. Singh, though, I will give a short

introduction to horse racing and betting in India and at the Delhi racecourse.

Betting at the Delhi Racecourse

According to the official statistics, betting on horse racing in India has been on the rise, with a total reported turnover of approximately 500 million dollars in 2012, more than double what it was ten years earlier.¹² The extent of gambling in India is, however, difficult to estimate, as most gambling activity exists in the informal sector, and in 2009 the total informal betting market was estimated at a 60 billion dollar annual turnover.¹³ Except for casinos on the shore of Goa, only horse-race betting and state lotteries (offered in a few states) are legal.¹⁴ This is based on legislation from the late nineteenth century that was founded upon the argument set forth among Britishers in India that at the racecourses, unlike among bookmakers in the streets of the Indian bazaars, a form of gambling could exist that demanded knowledge and skills beyond cheating and manipulations of results and beyond mere games of chance.¹⁵

The Delhi racecourse was built in 1940 and is located next to the prime minister’s home. Despite the prominent location, the racecourse is in decay and is not a place that is visited by the prime minister or other high-profile people or used for occasional socializing. The people who do come there, though, come at least once a week and only to bet. On a daily basis, approximately 3,000 bettors come to the races from all corners of the city, betting amounts ranging from 10 rupees to 500,000 (15 cents and 8,000 USD) rupees per bet.¹⁶ Apart from the prime minister’s home and a more exclusive polo ground, surrounding the racecourse are the stables, as well as a slum inhabited by people working in various ways with racing, either as horse caretakers, “riding boys,” jockeys, cleaners, or betting-machine operators.

The Delhi racecourse hosts live racing ap-

9. See Van Wyk, “Tata ma Chance”; Malaby, *Gambling Life*; Malaby, “Fateful Misconceptions”; Jansbøl, *Det Danske Spillemiljø*; and Cassidy, “Gambling as Exchange.”

10. Geertz, “Deep Play.”

11. All the names of people and horses are pseudonyms.

12. See “Wagering: Facts and Figures,” International Federation of Horseracing Authorities website, last accessed August 12, 2015, www.horseracingintfed.com/Default.asp?section=Resources&area=4.

13. Thompson, “Betfair.”

14. Saini and Sethi, *Law Relating to Gambling*, 53.

15. See Birla, *Stages of Capital*, and Hardgrove, *Community and Public Culture*.

16. The information is based on a survey I conducted at the Delhi racecourse in March 2010 with 109 respondents.

proximately fifty days of the year, but it is open most days from around 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. On days with no live races, one can bet on the approximately 3,000 races held yearly in eight of the ten cities that today have operating racecourses in India. During this time, races from one of these cities are shown every thirty minutes on small television screens set up in various corners of the racecourse.

There are different ways of betting. You can bet either through the totalisator terminals handled by the club management or through one of the twenty-six bookmaker firms in the betting ring. There is also the option of placing your bet with one of the unlicensed bookmakers walking around the grounds, or you can bet from home by calling up “cutters” who place the bets for you at the racecourse while charging a fee.

Since the introduction of cell phones to India the illegal betting market has been on the rise. Today, it is easy to act as a bookmaker, as long as you have access to odds either from being present at the racecourse or from getting the information through the cell phone. To be able to compete with the large informal betting market, the licensed bookmakers also do most of their business beyond taxation. Based on my survey and interviews with bookmakers, I have estimated that only around 11 percent of all betting at the Delhi racecourse was reported and figured in the official statistics.

This means that limited finances are collected for the race club, which again means that except for the rare cup races, there is little money to be made from winning a race in Delhi, sometimes less than 100,000 rupees to be shared among the owner, trainer, and jockey. Considering that some bettors (3 percent) bet more than 100,000 rupees on a single race, there is *much* more money to be made from the bookmakers through the wagers put on the races than there is from the race club prizes. For example, one can make a lot of money from losing a race with a favorite horse, if one has made a deal with a bookmaker to share the bets wagered on that horse. This only represents one

of the ways in which race fixing is thought to take place. In the following, I will unpack ways of engaging with the uncertainty of possible fixed futures at the Delhi racecourse.

Chipper and His Cell Phone:

“This Is Very Secret Information”

I met Chipper a month into my fieldwork. I was standing alone looking at the horses doing their rounds in the paddock before the race was to start. Chipper came over to me without looking at the horses and told me to meet him “just after the fifth race over there [he pointed to where]. I have some information for you,” he said. Then he left. I never turned up where he suggested because I had been busy talking to another bettor. Later in the day Chipper approached me again, his face red with excitement. He told me that he had won 500,000 rupees (approximately 8,000 USD) in the previous race after he had bet 50,000 on the horse Trusted Friend with the odds 1/10.¹⁷ Chipper said: “I have really good contacts. We have a cell phone. I could not give information when I met you before because this is very secret information. The information was only confirmed after the horse had taken its round [in the paddock].”

I was excited for him. He did not seem like a man I would have thought had that kind of money. His English was limited and the way he carried himself did not command much respect. Chipper was a jovial man in his thirties with an open and searching look in his eyes. He wore jeans, a T-shirt, and trainers and had his hair slicked back with wax. He had a large smile, which emphasized his puffy and reddish cheeks. His excitement was contagious, and I could not help but be amazed at how his money had multiplied.

When I came to the racecourse the following day I looked for him, curious to know how he was getting the information. I found him with a large group of friends who were all attentive to what he was going to play in the next race. He told us that he had more information and asked whether I wanted to bet. As betting was part of my method of participant observation, I gave him 1,000 rupees

17. All of these horses were running during the fieldwork, but their names have been switched around.

and told him to bet for me whatever he was betting. A couple of minutes later I was 3,000 rupees richer.

Chipper was excited for both of us. He said that he thought he had finally found a reliable source. He had never met the person who gave him the information. According to him it was his friend's brother, a petty trainer. This trainer was a friend of a big trainer in Mumbai, who apparently owed Chipper's friend's brother a favor, and for which reason he provided him with information. Chipper called his source in the morning and found out which horses he should consider "backing." When he entered the racecourse, instead of depositing his cell phone, which most attendees did, he paid the 2000-rupee daily fee it cost to bring a cell phone inside the racecourse. He expected his source to confirm the information approximately ten minutes before the race, when the final decision on how the future was to unfold had been made. Sometimes the information was given over the phone, and other times it could be a sign given by the jockey in the paddock. For example, if the jockey held his whip in his left hand when he got on the horse, Chipper would know this meant his horse would win, and if he held it in the right it meant that it would not win. Chipper gave 10 percent of what he won to his source after each race for which he had received correct information, which the day before had reached 50,000 rupees. The money was transferred through a network of exchange among bookmakers and bettors across the country.

Over the next couple of months, I often bet with Chipper and also spent evenings with him, at his home, drinking with his friends from the racecourse. Chipper was living in a small, rented, barren room. His family owned land in a rural area in Northern India, some of which they had been selling off, and some of which they were utilizing for farming. The income from both was put toward Chipper, who, as the oldest son, was getting support to set up a real estate business in Delhi. The money, however, was by and large spent at the racecourse, and he had been doing that for a couple of years now, apparently without his parents know-

ing. Chipper's life was immersed in secrets, both toward his parents and his wife, who was not living in Delhi and was apparently unaware of his love affairs and short, lavish trips to the casinos of Macao, after winning large amounts.

For Chipper the outcome of a race was not evaluated according to whether or not there had been race fixing involved. He did not explicitly distinguish between a reality that was naturally determined and one that was manipulated. There was no objective future, just a future that one could have more or less, good or bad information on. When he lost, he did not complain that the races might have been fixed. Rather, he just evaluated it as a sign of a weak source. At times he spoke of the problem of multiple attempts to fix the same race. Even though his source had been given the correct information—based on the information given, for example, by the horse owners—the jockey of the horse could have been paid by a bookmaker to perform differently. These overlapping and competing attempts at fixing the future meant that there was always an uncertainty tied to the information he was given. Chipper therefore held on to his information source despite receiving information that turned out to be wrong, thinking that in the end futures could never be fixed with certainty.

Winning, on the other hand, was always taken as a sign of acquiring unique information. At times Chipper would not even talk about betting on "information" but on "confirmation." When he got a tip, he considered it as a tip on a future that had been confirmed by those creating it. When asked about who he thought was controlling the races, he revealed that he thought that not only the Indian mafia in Mumbai but also the Middle Eastern mafia were involved; however, he did not know the details about how it was done.

The economy of inside information has certain parallels to the economy of bribes. Jonathan Parry, in an article on corruption in India, explores how the overriding idea of corruption affects economic exchanges.¹⁸ He is interested in how an imaginary of an economic system of hidden bribes is generative of certain kinds of economic

18. Parry, "The Crisis of Corruption," 28.

exchanges within it. Parry describes the bribes involved in the recruitment process at a steel company in the state of Chhattisgarh, noting how such transactions are motivated by the dominant notion that bribes are the only possible route to a future job offer. How the system works on this assumption of corruption can be illustrated through the role of the *dalal*, a middleman or “commission agent” who is paid in order to improve the possibilities of getting a job for the bribe payers.¹⁹ Contact to a *dalal* was established through the extended networks of both parties, and consequently, the *dalal* for the bribe payer was neither a stranger nor a friend, but someone in between, someone who was both trusted and under suspicion. The idea of corruption, nevertheless, put the *dalal* in a lucrative position. If the bribe payer gets the job—for no matter what reason—it is interpreted as a consequence of the bribe. If the bribe payer does not get the job, it is simply a sign that it did not work out as intended because the *dalal* as a middleman was not the person in complete control.

The position of the *dalal* is not unlike the position of the cell-phone informer in horse racing. The informer at the Delhi racecourse was also a figure who took on a role in between friend and stranger. Chipper’s contact was mediated through an acquaintance who was put into the category of a friend, or at least a friend of the family, which framed the relationship as one with the potential for trust. Nevertheless, there was always an awareness that the informer might be cheating and giving away inside information, even though he did, in fact, not have any. Yet, because of the idea that the system of horse racing in itself was manipulated, for Chipper there was no alternative but to trust the informer—as in the case with the *dalal*.

Parry’s analysis shows how the idea of corruption also enables bribes and parallel economies; similarly, I argue that the speculation on fixed futures enables the existence of an economy of inside information. Jockeys, for example, who themselves make less than 10 percent of the winning amount of the races, can thus profit from selling information on races based on the assumption

that there is consistent race fixing. They can sell this information whether or not they know of any predecided outcome. Inside information is in such great demand that it does not threaten their sale if the “information” turns out to be true. Besides jockeys, there are a large number of people selling inside information at various prices, such as friends of jockeys, riding boys, trainers, and assistants, some of whom are present at the racecourse and others who are reached by cell phone.

According to Thomas Blom Hansen and Oskar Verkaaik, a characteristic of the postcolonial city is the existence of what they call an “urban specialist.”²⁰ These are figures supposedly “in the know” based on their connections to people in power, who act in spaces immersed in unpredictability.²¹ According to Hansen and Verkaaik the ultimate embodiment of the urban specialist is the taxi operator with his “wild connectivity.”²² The taxi driver’s power thus lies in his connection to people and places. At the racecourse, I came across a bettor whose source of information was a rickshaw driver in Bangalore. The rickshaw driver supposedly took a horse owner to the Bangalore racecourse every day, and as part of his daily route received information from the owner on what would happen in the races. The rickshaw informer was then paid by the bettor in Delhi for information on races in Bangalore. He could also be used for races in other cities, since the horse owner apparently knew people from Mumbai and Hyderabad with whom he shared information. This is an example of the way that a driver can become an urban specialist, or at least a race specialist: being connected not emotionally or by way of kinship, but through a physical presence with people considered to have power in terms of knowing or manipulating the future.

The bribe-receiving *dalal* described by Parry, the “wildly” connected driver described by Hansen and Verkaaik, and the informer in Indian racing have something in common. They derive their power—and their money—from their connections as well as the demand for their services. This is valuable in a system in which unpredict-

19. *Ibid.*, 36.

21. *Ibid.*, 16.

20. Hansen and Verkaaik, “Urban Charisma,” 20.

22. *Ibid.*, 21.

ability is tied to the existence of people thought to have power over the future, or the power to plan its performance. In the case of betting, the speed and geographical scale at which these connections come into effect has increased since the introduction of the cell phone, enabling exchanges to happen quickly and independent of immediate physical contact.

For Chipper, the procedure of prediction was centered on inside information through the cell phone. Even though he did not complain or go into details about how the future was fixed, the procedure nevertheless was founded upon the idea that the future was known to some people and not to others. The future was not simply uncertain but was known with a particular certainty by the creators of the racing spectacle and those connected to them. This future imagination not only involved a speculation on systems of exchange, but also enabled an economy of information to exist parallel to the economy of betting. Now I will turn to the second bettor, Mr. Singh, who dealt with the problem of fixed futures in a very different way.

Mr. Singh and His Handicap: "It Is All about Math"

The very first day I came to the Delhi racecourse, I came with Mr. Singh, who was an uncle of a family friend of my in-laws. He picked me up in his car, and he gave me a booklet called BOL (translated as "speak"), which had all the information of the horses running in the races of the day. While his driver was steering the car, Mr. Singh gave me a quick introduction to how to "pick a winner" and told me, "It is all about math." He went through the various numerical variables of the horses' statistics before choosing his bet.

Mr. Singh was an unmarried man in his sixties who spent most of his time either at the racecourse or in his small bedroom in his large apartment, the majority of which he rented out. His room was covered with romantic posters of horses, a number of prizes from past races that his horses had won, and a large flat-screen television on which he watched American sitcoms. He was short with a strong build and melancholic eyes hiding under dark heavy glasses. He always wore beige khaki trousers and a pastel-colored short-sleeved shirt suffused with the scent of cologne. Mr. Singh was known at the racecourse to be a good "handi-

capper," a term used for a bettor applying the method of handicapping.

Handicapping is a method of calculating probabilities based on previous performance of horses and present conditions. Officially this is done by a person employed by the racecourse management, whose job it is to set the terms for the races. The handicapper decides which class (there are five classes) each horse should be running in and how much weight they should be carrying in their saddles. This process of handicapping creates a somewhat equal opportunity for the horses to win in the various handicap races, which is necessary for a sustainable betting market to exist, as bets are spread out on the various horses. What the official handicapper and the bettor termed a "handicapper" have in common is the use of statistics.

I came to know from Mr. Singh that the information given in BOL was central to the method of the handicap bettor. The BOL was a small booklet printed on thin paper and sold for 15 rupees at the entrance of the racecourse. The booklet was filled with small letters and numbers providing a variety of information that could be relevant for the handicapper, including the age of the horse, the distance it had been running, the weight it was carrying, the breed, the timing and length of its last race, what shoes it was wearing, whether it was wearing blinders, and whether the jockey was carrying a whip, as well as the name of the jockey, trainer, and owner and the class of the race.

Handicapping is therefore a time-consuming methodology. Mr. Singh at times brought a thick book of results covering the whole previous season, which was available at each racecourse, so that he could "study the performance" of each horse in detail. The level of calculations that went into his picking a horse meant that he had very little time to chat with other bettors, and he kept mostly to himself. He would sit in the same chair every day in the members' room watching the races. Once a week, during the live Delhi races, he was one of the few that would go to watch the horses in the paddock before the races to "see their condition." Despite his limited social interaction, most people at the racecourse knew of Mr. Singh and were aware of his handicapping method. They would describe him as someone who had "knowledge."

Most often handicapping would be associated with elder men of the upper-middle and upper class, and it was a sign of a certain level of education and ties with horses. Also, handicapping as a method of prediction is central to the legality of horse-race betting. Horse racing's legal status is based on the Supreme Court ruling, the most recent from 1996, that solidifies it is a "game of skill" for which "success depends principally upon the superior knowledge, training, attention, experience and adroitness of the player."²³ This is opposed to "games of chance," which on the contrary are considered illegal, a distinction that was established approximately one hundred years earlier during British colonialism,²⁴ when horse racing by the Indian public was called *sahib log's tamasha*, or "spectacle of the upper classes."²⁵ As the basic practice of calculation based on knowledge, handicapping brings legitimacy to horse-race betting, emphasizing it as a game of skill dependent on knowledge of horses. When those at the racecourse would let me know in his presence that "Mr. Singh is a great handicapper," he would clearly enjoy the compliment. When I spoke with bettors who were aware that I was interacting with a large number of different bettors, some would advise me to only follow the counsel of Mr. Singh and preferably not talk to anyone else. Yet, others would say that "Mr. Singh is knowledgeable, but he often fails. . . . Poor Mr. Singh, he keeps losing." The limitation of Mr. Singh's method and knowledge was tied to the existence of fixed races, where knowledge about horses was not considered to be enough. Mr. Singh was fully aware of this problem.

On my first day of coming to the racecourse with Mr. Singh, after browsing through the BOL he advised me to bet on Oriental Speed in the upcoming race, which he told me was a "safe bet." I felt confident that I was in good hands when Oriental Speed took off far ahead of all the other horses. However, just before the finish line, Oriental Speed fell to the ground dead! When this happened Mr. Singh laughed and told me that

the horse had been drugged. While this was not a common statement, I did hear of horses being held back by jockeys, having nails put up their shoes and being starved before races to prevent them from winning. When the horse fell down dead in front of our eyes, I was surprised by the lack of sympathy Mr. Singh showed for the horse, considering that he was a horse owner himself. On the same day he took me to the stables next to the racecourse where he slightly awkwardly hand-fed one of his horses, Tequila, some carrots. Mr. Singh had been coming to the racecourse daily for the past forty years, and throughout that time he had owned a small number of horses. His enthusiasm about his horses, however, was limited, and he kept his last two now, mostly for nostalgic reasons. One of the biggest problems with keeping a horse for him was that he never trusted any of his trainers. Being fooled by trainers and jockeys, who he presumed would go behind his back and "pull" his horses, had made keeping horses "such a pain," he said, suggesting that his horses were used for race fixing without his permission. Race fixing was a problem for him not only as a horse owner, but even more so as a bettor, and Mr. Singh would give voice to these worries on a daily basis. According to Mr. Singh, the morality of the racecourse was in decline, as the bookmaking market was increasingly taking over the sport by determining the performance of the horses.

As I got to know Mr. Singh a bit better, I learned that he had a handicapping method through which he tried to take the possibility of fixed races into account. One day when I visited his home, he showed me a notebook that he never brought to the racecourse. In the book he made a note every time he noticed something dubious that made him think that a horse might have been pulled. Before going to the races, he would take these notes into account when estimating these horses' chances in upcoming races. He also paid careful attention to the constellation of the owner, trainer, and jockey, looking for patterns in how races were fixed and who was involved. Through

23. Saini and Sethi, *Law Relating to Gambling*, 53.

24. Birla, *Stages of Capital*.

25. Chettiyappaya, "The Bangalore Turf Club." *Tamasha* means a spectacle or an event with bustle and excitement. It has connotations of both play and theatrical entertainment. It can be used in a positive context to describe a fun

activity and in a negative context to convey a deceptive show (as commonly used to describe Indian politics). The use of *sahib log's tamasha* points to the idea not only of a sport for the elite, but also of a sport staged by the elite.

this method, he was not only assessing the horses but also gauging the people behind the horses.

As part of handicapping I noticed that pedigree, a central variable in horse racing in places like England and the United States, was never considered to have a major effect on the horse. This neglect of the pedigree of the horses among bettors was in sharp contrast to how people were viewed outside the racecourse in Delhi, where kinship was considered an important determinant of people's possibilities and potentials. Inside the racecourse, genes and the family heritage of the horses were not used to measure the horses' future success—not even among handicappers. Rather, it was the people behind the horses, and their relationships, that engendered the probabilities.

Race fixing represents a crucial problem for the method of handicapping, which is based on the calculation of stochastic probabilities. Nevertheless, in handicapping one can integrate manipulations as a variable in the calculation of probabilities. Mr. Singh's personal method of handicapping gives insight into how knowledge of a manipulated future can be sought through a mixture of figuring out the intentions of people and mathematical calculations. This exemplifies speculation as a form of knowledge production in between calculation and suspicion.

Mr. Singh and Chipper shared the assumption that the races were possibly being fixed; however, they employed two different procedures for predicting the possibly fixed future. Whereas the younger generation of bettors, like Chipper, are oriented toward insider information by paying for it or getting a tip from someone who might have good contacts, the older generation are more inclined to do some version of handicapping. Yet, according to both generations, I was told that "nowadays handicapping is not enough," and the older cohort clearly felt threatened by the youngsters with their cell phones. The older age group talked of a shift in the ethics of racing that demanded a shift in the calculative ethos as well.

Coarse Accounting

Gerda Reith, in her historical examination of gambling in Western civilization, has traced a development from imperial Rome until today in terms of how outcomes are believed to be determined as reflected in shifting gambling practices. Reith tracks this movement from the early idea of divine powers interfering with nature to the dominance of chance as part of the laws of nature,²⁶ which is parallel to what Ian Hacking has described in his historical genealogy of the development of probability and statistics.²⁷ The development of the use of statistical methods in gambling is thus tied to the establishment of a belief in stochastic outcomes. Yet, at the Delhi racecourse, there was a belief neither in divine interference nor in chance, but in humanly created outcomes subject to both the strict rules of the game and the socio-economic context and systems of exchange in which the game takes place. This demanded procedures of prediction that were neither about praying for divine help, which bettors made clear they would never do considering gambling is morally bad,²⁸ nor focused on mathematical calculation of empirically determined probabilities. Rather, the process was oriented toward predicting the intentions of people considered to have the power to control the spectacle of horse racing.

In examining shifts in procedures of prediction, I see some interesting similarities in developments in the methods of forecasting described not only in gambling, which I will return to in the next paragraph, but also in ethnographies of financial markets. In an article based on studies of financial firms, Hirokazu Miyazaki and Annelise Riles describe the current time in finance as a stage that manifests a "failure of economic knowledge."²⁹ They identify a shift in the methods of acquiring knowledge where Japanese traders have gone from reading economic books to reading books on social relations and on how to read other people's minds.³⁰ This is because the knowledge needed for predicting markets is knowledge about the people in the markets, rather than the prospects of its financial products. Caitlin Zaloom has observed a similar

26. Reith, *The Age of Chance*, and Reith, "The Pursuit of Chance."

27. Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*, and Hacking, *The Taming of Chance*.

28. See Puri, "Gambling Is Gambling."

29. Miyazaki and Riles, "Failure as Endpoint," 320.

30. *Ibid.*, 326.

shift in US and British futures markets, from “interpretative analysis” based on economic models toward a focus on how people are acting in the market. According to Zaloom, market movements were interpreted as signs of other market players’ intentions and considered a central clue to the future direction of the market.³¹ Miyazaki breaks the shift in the knowledge production of finance into three stages, which he has identified through an ethnographic study of a single person, Tada, who worked in a Japanese financial securities firm over a period of approximately ten years. Tada started out in his job using a methodology stemming from logic, mathematical calculations, and models.³² As this approach seemed to fail, he shifted to a strategy of following inside information, which implied taking larger risks. Eventually he abandoned this strategy after having had tremendous losses, which he blamed on the lack of reliability of his connections. He then shifted to a third strategy, which combined the previous two, as he developed a system of calculating people’s trustworthiness. To carry out this method Tada developed complex accounting sheets, which he used to predict various outcomes.

A parallel can be drawn between the shifts in Tada’s methods and changes in the methods of betting at the racecourse in terms of the knowledge applied in order to predict the future. Handicapping, in which mathematical skills are combined with knowledge of horses at the racecourse, mainly exists as an idea of a method that well-educated bettors are using. Just as in financial markets there is a failure of economic knowledge, as argued by Miyazaki and Riles, at the Delhi racecourse there was a failure of horse knowledge. Wagering on the future based on inside information is similar to the method of Chipper, for whom the reliability of the source is central to his success. The type of method for prediction that Mr. Singh is applying when he marks down signs of manipulation in races, combining this knowledge with an estimation of the horses’ abilities and patterns suggesting how certain constellations of people are manipulating outcomes, is more about calculating the intentions and to some extent also the trustworthiness of people. He is trying to forecast the future

by identifying patterns in how people are attempting to manage outcomes.

This way of integrating calculations of social relations can furthermore be illustrated through the method of keeping accounts of wins and losses, which not only Mr. Singh but most other bettors did. Whereas Mr. Singh had a written accounting sheet at home, Chipper retained it by memory. I came to learn that the method around which accounts were made on wins and losses had a certain pattern: (1) The account was temporally divided into months and the racing season as a whole from September to May, and (2) it was geographically divided into the different racecourses in which the races had taken place. Bettors would thus keep approximately seven separate accounts concurrently covering the whole season and would separate them into Delhi races, Mumbai races, Pune races, Bangalore races, Hyderabad races, Mysore races, and Kolkata races. The bettors’ way of structuring the past through their profits enabled them to evaluate their strategies not simply by the total number of wins and losses, but by wins and losses set in the different socioeconomic settings in which the races were happening. For example, Mr. Singh would say, “I am in minus in Mumbai and Pune, but I am in plus in Delhi.” Chipper would say upon winning a large amount, “Now I am back in Delhi races,” which meant that he was now on the plus side of his Delhi races account.

When trying to understand the patterns of the races, the bettors were looking not only at the horses but at the centers in which the races were taking place. In India, horse owners, trainers, and jockeys generally stick to a single racecourse, except at cup or invitation races such as the derby. Each Bangalore race, for example, almost always involves the same actors. Some horse owners are known to pull their horses more than others, or a specific combination of jockey and trainer may be considered to be a constellation whereby the likelihood of a horse being pulled is taken into account based on assessments of previous races with that team. Keeping accounts of a specific center is therefore a way to keep track of economies and relationships that determine the performance of the races.

31. Zaloom, “Ambiguous Numbers.”

32. See Miyazaki, *Arbitraging Japan*, and Miyazaki, “Economy of Dreams.”

For Chipper, he used this accounting to analyze his information source. After a month's racing, he evaluated whether his source had been mostly right or wrong, and more important, in which racing centers the source had been correct. Then he could adjust his use of the information source accordingly and have various sources give information from different racecourses. Once he knew that he had failed because of a certain source, he could replace that source for that particular racecourse.

Accounts are also kept for each individual racecourse, as each racecourse is considered to have distinct economies and ethics influencing the conditions of the races. People's perceptions of the Delhi racecourse are the same, whether you talk to a regular bettor in Delhi or a bettor at one of the other racecourses. In the words of a bettor at the Mysore racecourse: "In Delhi you don't use handicapping; handicapping is not enough there. At Delhi racecourse there is a lot of pulling [of horses]." He thus used different methods at different centers, emphasizing that handicapping as a method did not work for races held in Delhi because inside information was needed in that setting.

The Mumbai racecourse, conversely, is considered to have the most races with people actually wanting their horses to win. "In Mumbai the owners are very rich. They don't need the money; they just want to have their picture taken [when receiving the prize]," I was told by Mr. Singh. That said, the mafia is believed to be more involved in Mumbai than at other racecourses, which means that the possibility of fixed races still looms in the background, as the mafia can go behind the backs of the fame-seeking owners and strike deals with the jockeys.

Hyderabad racecourse was considered the most "developed" course. "Developed" meant that it was run in such a way that the rules and economy of modern institutions had a greater impact on the results. It was the only racecourse in India that owned the land on which the horses were running. This racecourse, unlike the others in the country, was situated not on the original piece of land where the racecourse had been built by the British in the political power center, but on land that had been bought after Indian independence by the

race club at the margins of the city. Bettors therefore considered the racecourse to be more independent from politicians, who I was told provided the race clubs with the leases in return for bribes. Considering that the Hyderabad racecourse club did not have to pay the enormous rent—along with bribes—the club could offer some of the highest prizes for the winning horses in the country because of its good internal finances. The racecourse also had an education center, where jockeys, trainers, handicappers, and racecourse managers were given a formal education and degree. Therefore, in Hyderabad it was considered more likely that the people behind the horses would aim to win the races with the required competences instead of making money at betting.

What is interesting, however, is that the Hyderabad races are *not* more popular than the Delhi and Mumbai races among bettors at the Delhi racecourse. The reason is that if all horses are trying to win a race, it can be more difficult to predict the race, as was pointed out to me: "When the stakes [winning prices] are high, at least six or eight horses will try [to win]." This is different from other races with low winning prizes, where many of the horses are considered "not on the job," as they are just running as pawns in a larger game. Compared to the Delhi and Mumbai races, there is less betting at the races of Hyderabad, suggesting that part of the attraction of betting is figuring out the possibly performed future.

Whether based on one's calculative skills or an information source, keeping an account of wins and losses divided among the different racing centers allows bettors to evaluate their own strategies in relationship to larger economic systems in which the races are taking place. Regional stereotypes of greedy "Delhi-wallahs," fame-seeking Mumbaiites close to the mafia, and professional Hyderabadis known for their IT businesses and international standards were reinforced and acted upon at the racecourse. The prediction of race fixing thus depends on the perception of the racecourse, its surroundings, and its people, and therefore the method of prediction is adjusted according to where the races are taking place. Betting methods are not only tied to the possibility of race fixing in horse racing at large, but rather embedded in perceptions of local economies and ethics. There-

fore, statistics are used not just in order to predict horses through handicapping, but also in an attempt to evaluate the patterns of each racecourse's economy through account keeping.

What I have identified both in the case of Mr. Singh's use of handicapping and in the method of keeping account is how statistics are used creatively to predict futures beyond a belief in stochastic outcomes. The use of simple statistics, therefore, does not necessarily represent a universal surrender to laws of chance predictable through mathematical models, but it can also indicate an active engagement with a context-specific interpretation of uncertainty. Locating the engagement with uncertainty in the various geographical settings in India brings insight into the embeddedness of speculation implied in both finance and gambling. I will return to the anthropology of gambling below, in order to provide another level of comparison.

Venturing beyond India

Speculations on possible manipulations of outcomes in gambling are not unique to India. It is likewise commonly assumed among lottery players in South Africa that the numbers are not randomly picked but purposely chosen by those powerful men running the lottery. Among the poor people of South Africa, according to Ilana Van Wyk, they turn to diviners for help in picking the right numbers in such circumstances, though with a fair amount of skepticism.³³ At the roulette tables in Danish casinos, players, according to Kåre Jansbøl, pay attention to the intentionality of the croupiers throwing the ball, assuming that they are not simply producing a random outcome but are aiming at particular numbers.³⁴ Similar situations have been observed at American and South African casinos.³⁵ Thus, even at modes of gambling associated with chance, such as lotteries and roulette, intentional outcomes are assumed, showing a disbelief in the chances of stochastic outcomes.

In forms of gambling more commonly associated with skill such as poker, it is an integral part of the game to figure out the intention of the

other players.³⁶ In poker, similar to the development in predictive procedures in financial markets, Ole Bjerg has identified a number of shifts in the methods of playing, which he links to bigger changes in capitalism.³⁷ He argues that there was a shift in the early 1970s, where players went from using mathematical skills in order to calculate the odds of drawing particular cards to focusing on being able to understand the human games and characters behind the cards. He connects this shift with the development of financial capitalism from 1971 on, where capitalism has increasingly developed as an economy of signs and where financial speculation has come to dominate the economy. According to Bjerg, shifts in the economic systems at large and ways in which value are generated are thus reflected in the game of poker.

Similarly, based on the narratives of elder bettors at the racecourse, there was a noticeable change in betting methods over the last twenty years where betting had gradually become less about knowing about the horses. This time frame coincides with the onset of the "New India" in 1991, when neoliberal economic policies tied the Indian economy to global finance. Furthermore, bookmakers emphasize 1995 as a year of an important transformation, since this was the year in which the cell phone was introduced in India. This has meant a gradual increase in phone-based betting, and for the bettors, much easier access to inside information across the country. Thus developments in politics and technologies have enabled the exchange of both money and information to exist in new ways.

Whereas assumption of manipulations of outcomes exists in other gambling settings, judging from two short fieldtrips to Klampenborg racecourse in Denmark in 2010 and 2011, I did not identify similar ways of assuming the presence of race fixing. Here the primary focus seemed to be directed more at the potential of the horses and the ability of the jockeys to ride them than at the hidden intentions of the jockeys and horse owners. By drawing on this comparison, I am not claiming

33. Van Wyk, "Tata ma Chance."

34. Jansbøl, *Det Danske Spillemiljø*.

35. See Oldman, "Chance and Skill," 419, and Sallaz, *Labor of Luck*, 11.

36. See Jansbøl, *Det Danske Spillemiljø*, and Hayano, *Poker Faces*.

37. Bjerg, *Poker*.

that there are fewer instances of race fixing in a Danish setting, which I am unable to determine, but simply that this reveals differences in the perceptions of what controls the future and the potential of human agency. During a short trip I made to the Belmont racecourse in New York in 2011, bettors expressed concern for race manipulations done through performance-enhancing drugs. This was different from manipulations at the Delhi racecourse, which conversely were done by refraining a horse from winning. Bettors in New York were taking into consideration the large amount of prize money allocated for the winner, in contrast to most Indian races. These differences illustrate very well how the perception of future contingency is embedded in local economies and its economic structure and perception, similar to the ways in which bettors interpreted the races of the various Indian racecourses differently. Thus there is both a geographical and a temporal scale at which variations and shifts in the underlying structures of uncertainty are imagined and engaged with.

Even though horse-race betting is on the rise in India, cricket betting represents the largest gambling market, even though it is illegal. Appadurai has shown how cricket through time has been tied to first colonialism, then nationalism, and more recently corporatism.³⁸ Today, there is also a rising anxiety tied to the betting market and the match fixing associated with it. The real players in the game—those that decide the outcomes—are believed to be the bookmakers and the mafia extending beyond the borders of India. Thus sports, as in other spheres of life, are further subject to global financialization, which marks shifts to a more speculative approach to future events. As part of this larger development, the skill of horse racing at the Delhi racecourse according to bettors had to do not only with being smart but also with being connected. This mirrors a dominant perception of power in contemporary India.

Conclusion

The Delhi racecourse offers an opportunity to examine embedded speculations in a simplified and bounded risk market. In the article, I have illustrated how the speculations on future events were embedded in local economies. While this brings insight into perceptions of power and exchange in India, it also enables an analysis of parallel shifts in methods for predicting the future in other national and financial contexts. Central to understanding the calculative ethos of risk markets, then, is an attention to existing systems of exchange of money and information and the speculations on these in between the visible spectacles and the concealed transactions. Contextualized uncertainties, however, have not fully been explored in existing ethnographies of financial speculation.³⁹

By foregrounding the predictive practices involved in gambling at the Delhi racecourse, the distinction between gambling associated with irrational and rapid modes of decision making and financial speculation considered grounded in long-term calculative methods is thus blurred. This is a distinction established legally and popularly in the nineteenth century in India and in the West.⁴⁰ Bettors at the Delhi racecourse consistently make parallels between horse-race betting and financial speculation. Examining their procedures for prediction unpacked embedded future imaginaries.

At the Delhi racecourse, the future did not exist as an unknown event that was to unfold, but as a performed event controlled by people in the industry. The idea of the races being possibly manipulated directed attention to the people behind the horses and their relationships of exchange rather than the horses themselves. The possibilities of a horse winning were not related to the horses' capabilities but to the power and connections of the people behind them. This future imaginary brought along with it various procedures for prediction focused on inside information and the calculation of the patterns of behavior within various economic contexts. In other words, as the ex-

38. Appadurai, "Imagined Worlds."

39. Existing ethnographies include Zaloom, *Out of the Pits*; Zaloom, "How to Read the Future"; Zaloom, "Ambiguous Numbers"; Zaloom, "The Discipline of Speculators"; Miyazaki, "Econ-

omy of Dreams"; Miyazaki and Riles, "Failure as Endpoint"; Miyazaki, *Arbitraging Japan*; Beunza and Garud, "Calculators, Lemmings or Frame-makers?"; and Clark et al., "Performing Finance."

40. On India, see Birla, *Stages of Capital*. On the West, see Loussouarn, "Spread Betting and the City of London"; Fabian, *Card Sharps*; and Munting, *An Economic and Social History of Gambling*.

istence of race fixing could never fully be known, the racecourse could exist as a speculative space where prediction developed in between calculation, information sharing, and imaginaries of concealed economies. ■■■■

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